

May-June 2015

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BIBLE ADVOCATE®



Day of Delight



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2015: Crossroads

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A publication of the

Church of God (Seventh Day)

This magazine is published to advocate the Bible, represent the Church, and glorify the God of grace and truth.

Volume 149 • Number 3

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The BIBLE ADVOCATE (ISSN 0746-0104) is published bimonthly by Bible Advocate Press, 330 W. 152nd Ave., Broomfield, CO 80023. Periodicals postage is paid at Broomfield, CO, and at additional offices. Subscription is free to any who ask. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Bible Advocate Press, Box 33677, Denver, CO 80233-0677.

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Subscriptions and Orders

Bible Advocate Press
P.O. Box 33677
Denver, CO 80233-0677
phone: 303/452-7973
fax: 303/452-0657
e-mail: bibleadvocate@cog7.org
orders: bap.orders@cog7.org

Notice: Send all address changes and other correspondence to the address above.

Publications Agreement No. 40042428

Cover photo: @ Edite Artmann—Dreamstime.com

The Bible Advocate Online appears at www.BAonline.org.

Roots and Fruit

Do you have grandchildren? If not, sit down and let me tell you about mine. Our youngest is a year old, and the oldest of our sixteen will soon marry. More fruit ahead.

More fitting today is to talk about roots. My parents and grandparents were all Christ-followers in this church. Both the Davisons (Mom's family) and Sheffields (Dad's family) produced pioneer CoG7 preachers, and a great uncle Davison preached for the Seventh Day Baptists. My Sabbath roots run deep.

Did you know that Seventh Day Baptists (SDB) are the oldest Sabbath church in America? Did you know that Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) are among the world's largest protestant churches — about twenty million members? Did you know that the SDA founders learned Sabbath from an SDB woman? Did you know that many more Christians than SDA, SDB, and CoG7 keep Sabbath? For more on all Sabbathkeepers, see the Bible Sabbath Association (BSA) box on page 28.

Which brings me back to my parents. In their mid-forties, while running a farm and raising four juveniles, Lawrence and Lottie Burrell began serving as secretary-treasurer of the non-denominational BSA, an unpaid role they held forty years. With the BSA office in our home, we were exposed to regular interaction with SDBs, SDAs, and all the rest that comprise the diverse community of Christian Sabbathkeepers. That's how my Sabbath roots deepened and widened.

If you've doubted CoG7's commitment to Sabbath, this BA is for you. If you grew up with Sabbath roots but mostly left them behind, this BA is for you. If you've never seen the elements of grace and truth in the Bible's original holy day, this BA is for you. If you see the seventh day as a line dividing sheep from goats, this BA is for you. If your Sabbath practice draws mostly on texts from Moses and the Torah, this BA is for you. If you're not sure what to believe about Christ or the Sabbath, this BA is for you. If you love Jesus more than anything and hope to follow His teaching and practice, it's still for you.

In our families, in our churches, in our world, Sabbath roots and gospel fruit have never been more important than now. I'm trusting you'll find plenty of both on the pages that follow. Read on.

— Calvin Burrell



The week has passed. My work is done. Sun has set; Sabbath is here. I'm so ready.

Another busy workweek wore me out, as usual. I've leaned toward this moment all day. Walking through the front door, I sigh audibly, bodily. The best day of the week arrives in the nick of time, greeting me like an old friend. I smile.

I can't explain it, but in that instant, space shifts, time tips, and I let go. It's Sabbath.

So here I am writing these thoughts with my family sleeping, the lights low, and my feet kicked up.

I love the Sabbath. I have for as long as I can remember. I can't imagine living without it or why anyone would want to try. A well-meaning Christian once told me I didn't have to keep Sabbath because I wasn't under the law. My defense wasn't theologically well formed, although I think it could've been. All that came out then was "Can I keep it if I want?"

Now it's a running joke in my family. Dragging myself home on Friday evening, I'll often quip with a wink to my wife, while I'm flopping onto the couch, "Thank God I'm under the law."

I just turned 48, and my workweek takes a bigger toll as the years pile up. Yes, I was one of the weird church kids who actually liked Sabbath p.m. naps. I enjoy them now even more, along with what "church" can really be and how Sabbath makes that possible.

If real life has taught me anything, it's that I need Sabbath and that Sabbath is there *for me*. For all of us. It's not just about



The Bless

One writer's delight in Sabbath practice means delight for readers too. by Jason Overman

the law, important as that is; it's about delight. Sabbath is the best day of the week simply because it's the *blessed* day of the week. A delight. Why would anyone want to miss out on that?

Lord of Sabbath

The more I experience Sabbath as a *blessing*, the more I realize how much it's entangled in Jesus. I learned long ago that I can't fully know God's Sabbath

by starting at creation and moving toward Christ through the law. Jesus is the first, the last, and the center. Beginning with Him, I discover that whichever way I go, He's waiting for me there, illuminating the text in wonderful ways.

Mark 2:23-28 illustrates this profoundly. It tells how Jesus' hungry disciples picked grain to eat while walking through a field on the Sabbath and were accused by the Pharisees of break-



sed Day

ing the command. Jesus, more concerned about human need than defining *work*, replies, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (vv. 27, 28).

I love the simplicity in which Jesus corrects the misguided Pharisees who, in professing the day, had missed its blessing: Don’t take what God made *for* us and turn it *against* us. Jesus can say this because He is “Lord

of the Sabbath.” That’s it in a nutshell.

As simple as Jesus’ reply is in this situation, it blows my mind how far-reaching it is. Jesus addresses the origin (“made”), the intent (“for”), and the scope (“man”/humanity) of the Sabbath.

As in a later argument over marriage and divorce (10:2-12), you can almost hear Jesus saying, “But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made . . .’”

(v. 6). Christ can take us back to creation and claim lordship over it because as the Word of God, He was there (John 1:1-3). He *made* it all and knows its purpose as only the Creator can. Let’s head back to the beginning now and find the Lord of the Sabbath there.

Then God blessed

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made (Genesis 2:1-3).

If this were all the Bible ever said about Sabbath, I’d be asking, “How do I get in on this blessed day?”

The first thing declared “holy” in Scripture isn’t a *thing* at all but the *day* in which God ceased from His creative work, having declared it all “very good.” The “holy” points us away from things made and the labors by which they are made, to what transcends and enriches it all: God. By His example we sense the call to let go and trust Him.

Further, the blessing of the seventh day is not the first “blessing” of creation week. By the time God “rested” (*shabath*, root of *Sabbath*), He’d already blessed the living creatures created on the fifth day (1:20-23) and man (*adam*, or “humanity”), created “in His image” (vv. 26-28) on the sixth. The sixth day was God’s creative peak, and His blessing the seventh indicates that cre-

ation's goal is our final rest in God.

When God blesses humanity, He addresses them personally (v. 28). On the heels of this intimate blessing of those shaped in His image and called to flourish, God ends His work and blesses the seventh day, resting with His creation. These two blessings interrelate and correlate. The final touch, Sabbath, was not blessed for its own sake but for the sake of *the blessed* — those who would labor after God, imitating Him.

The blessed man followed by the blessed day establishes the priority to which Jesus spoke in Mark 2:27, 28. The one precedes the other, the latter enriches the former, and God, who blesses both, is Lord over all.

Like marriage, another divine institution woven into the created order prior to man's fall, Sabbath is neither named nor commanded in Genesis 2. Like that first marriage, it is simply, sublimely modeled by Divine initiative, its invitation extended to the first *adam* and all who follow.

Delight in the Lord

Beyond Eden, sin distorts and robs people of God's best gifts, as we saw in Mark 2 and 10 with

Sabbath and marriage. Our God-given "dominion" has been subverted by pride so that Sabbath is either overlooked or oppressive, its blessing lost. We need a change of heart.

God's creatures may forget or resist this blessed day, ignore it, or resent it, but to no avail. It remains. Sabbath is blessed and holy however I may choose to acknowledge it, or not. It's just the way the world is, the way God the Word made it. Sabbath continues to witness to the truth that our Creator and Redeemer is, relentlessly, *for us*:

- He offered Sabbath rest to a mixed multitude of former slaves just out of Egypt (Exodus 16).

- He commanded them to follow His Sabbath example, remembering to share this blessed day with male/female, slave/free, citizen/foreigner — even domestic animals (Exodus 20).

- He gave Israel a Sabbath song to celebrate His faithfulness and our flourishing (Psalm 92).

- He promised a coming covenant, Sabbath rest, and the ingathering of all peoples (Isaiah 56).

This biblical witness anticipates Christ's words that the Sabbath was made for us — God's work in Christ — and the new covenant written on the hearts

of all who trust Him (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10). Jesus embodied Sabbath when He went about working miracles of restoration, especially on Sabbath. This kingdom, now and not yet, this King, come and coming, are Sabbath-shaped — a blessing of rest and restoration for the world (Hebrews 4:9; Matthew 11:28-30).

It does indeed take more than Divine example and command to live Sabbath-shaped lives. Our proud, restless hearts resist God's blessing. It takes the full operation of God in Christ through the Spirit to embody Isaiah's vision of lives set free from their own works and pursuits in order to call Sabbath a delight and to delight in Sabbath's Lord (58:13, 14).

Reading the stories of gospel, of creation, and of law and prophets, it's impossible for me to evade the scriptural weight of *Sabbath-as-blessing-for-us*.

Sabbath blessing

Now the night is far past. I'm still sitting here, pecking away, lost in my Sabbath thoughts on the *best* and *blessed* day of the week.

I'm praying for us all to find that blessed delight this Sabbath and the next and the one after that. To delightfully model Sabbath blessing just as God the Father and His Son have shown us. **BA**

Jason Overman

pastors the Jasper, AR church and works at the *Harrison Daily Times*.



This kingdom, now and not yet, this King, come and coming, are Sabbath-shaped — a blessing of rest and restoration for the world.

Questions & Answers



How do you CoG7 folks keep Sabbath under the new covenant?

Not by the rules and regulations of the old Mosaic covenant. One of these rules was that no fire could be kindled on the Sabbath (Ex. 35:3). Another was that no burden could be carried on that day (Num. 15:32-36). Both of these infractions of Sabbath carried the death penalty under the Mosaic order. But the old covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai is *not* our covenant. We have a new and better one, as the author of Hebrews emphasizes repeatedly (7:12, 22; 8:7-13; 10:1-22).

Neither do we keep the Sabbath by the Jewish traditions that prevailed in Jesus' time. These prohibited food preparation on Sabbath (Matt. 12:1, 2) and travel beyond a Sabbath day's journey (Acts 1:12). By the time of Christ, a minutia of rules had largely encrusted the simple Sabbath ordinance of creation, making it good for little or nothing in practice.

Nor do we keep it according to any list of human dos and don'ts in the modern age. The Church and its people must always resist the temptation to propose a set of rules and regulations for Christian Sabbathkeeping, for to do so would imply that we — not Jesus — are lord of the Sabbath.

Rather, we seek to remember Sabbath and keep it holy in Spirit-led ways that are informed and enriched by . . .

- the Creator's action and example in creation week. God finished His work in six days and rested on the seventh. Then He blessed the seventh day (Gen. 2:2, 3; Heb. 4:1-11) for the same

reason He blesses people: so that it and we will bless others. We rest on Sabbath. Rest is blest. Blessing others is what Sabbath and we are called to do. Sabbathkeeping means we change our pace to something other than ordinary business of the other six days.

- the spirit of the fourth commandment in the Decalogue. The thrust of the Sabbath command in moral law is to refrain from customary work that busies us six days (Ex. 20:8-11). On this day we seek to be creative in pursuing life's highest purposes: assembly for public worship, instruction in the Word, believers' fellowship, and unique forms of well-doing often omitted in our weekly routines. From the other days, Sabbath offers a step up in loving service to God and others.

- our faith-link with Christ, through the Holy Spirit. The grace and truth we have come to know in Jesus leave us no choice but to embrace a gospel-centered view of Sabbath. This means that He is Lord of the day, just as He is Lord of our lives. The seventh was made for people, not vice versa; and Jesus, not Moses, fills the day to the full by His teaching and His example. Under Him, a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God. It is lawful to do good, to save life, and to serve the gospel and others in Christ's name on this best and blest day of the week.

Church members sometimes disagree on how these principles should be applied. When we do, we should check our attitudes (Phil. 2:1-5), give priority to the Sabbath examples and teachings of Jesus, and then respect the conscientious convictions of each devoted follower of Christ (Rom. 14).

— Elder Calvin Burrell

Rest: What a glorious word! Those who've labored under a summer sun know the blessing simple rest can bring. Remember that tall glass of iced lemonade under a shaded porch with a gentle breeze blowing? Rest, even in small portions, is glorious indeed!

From Genesis to Revelation, the ever-increasing glory of rest unfolds. God promised Solomon rest from all his enemies, a blessing that enabled him to fulfill his father David's vision to build a house for the Lord.

Israel missed the opportunity of rest. God delivered them from Egypt, but they failed to lay hold of God's promises. So He swore in His wrath, "They shall not enter My rest" (Hebrews 3:11). So tragic was this that a whole generation died as wanderers in the desert instead of entering the Promised Land.

Fortunately, the story doesn't end there. Christ invites us to "Come to Me, all you who labor . . . and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The final rewards are great, according to the book of Revelation: Though there is no rest for the wicked, there is — praise the Lord — for the righteous (14:11, 13)!

So we see that the concept of rest is not just in the Bible's beginning; it's in the middle, it's in Christ, and it's in eternity. Given the fact that God rested (Genesis 1:1; 2:2), our rest must be important to Him.

Creation and worship

Imagine the scene: six days of unthinkable, indescribable creation as from God's word comes forth the universe and all things therein. Breathtaking! Then it is



finished — and God rests. In His wisdom, God performs one final act: He blesses the day He rested and sets the seventh apart as sacred (Genesis 2:3). For us, it's a special day to reflect on creation and to worship its Creator.

How appropriate this day! Creation is not to be rushed over but reflected on. Scripture stresses this. "Say to God, 'How awesome are Your works!'" writes the psalmist (66:3). And in Job, "Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God" (37:14). Creation without reflection would be like Washington D.C. without memorials, marriage without anniversary, or our Lord's death with no communion.

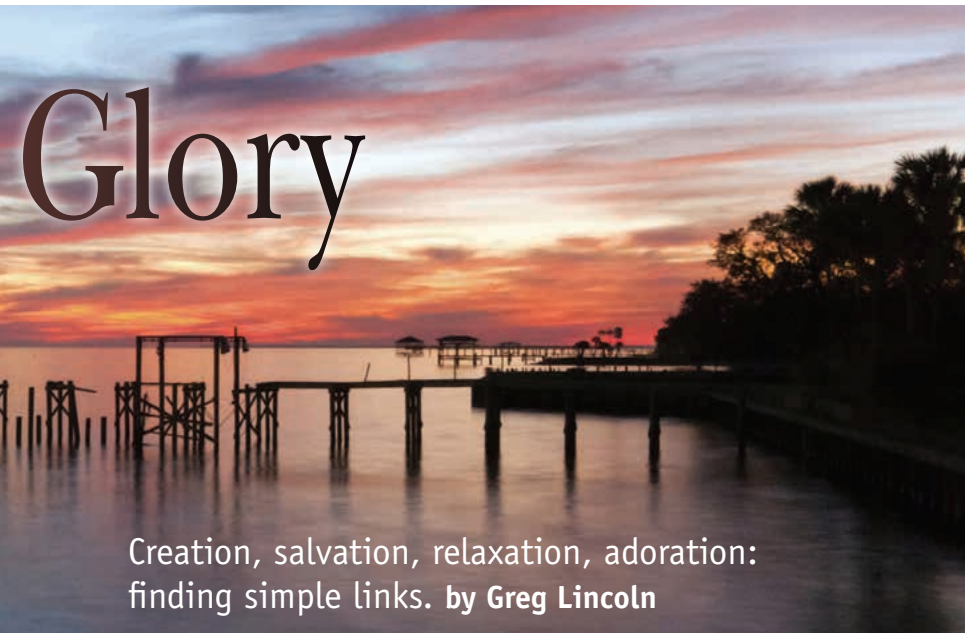
The Sabbath helps here. Neither Divine afterthought nor mere filler, the seventh day is perfectly placed for us to pause and consider the wondrous works of God. It's an invitation to rest, yes, and so much more. Sabbath is our God-moment to see and reflect upon His finished work — to worship *and rejoice!*

"The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). As we reflect upon creation, we see the design, wisdom, and power of the Creator, and worship is birthed — not just here but in heaven: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

Sabbath is special because, unlike the other six days, it is not marked by work. It's also special because, thanks to God's blessing in the beginning, it is meant for reflection and worship. In the Divine economy, rest and worship are linked.

Redemption and worship

There's so much more. God's blessing of the Sabbath extended it well beyond His Creation. Hebrews 4:10 states, "For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His." Within this verse is the truth that one who has entered into the rest of God has also ceased from his works



Glory

Creation, salvation, relaxation, adoration:
finding simple links. by Greg Lincoln

— a picture of our salvation in Christ.

The Genesis scene of God’s invitation to rest in His completed work, to keep the sacred Sabbath, and to worship becomes a vivid picture of our rest within the new covenant. Note the parallels between creation rest and redemptive rest:

- As God completed His creation work (Genesis 2:2), so Christ completed His work of atoning for sin, paying its debt, and satisfying God’s wrath against sinners (John 19:30).
- As God invited humanity to rest every seventh day of the week (Exodus 20:8-10), so Christ invites us to enter into His finished redemptive work and rest in Him (Matthew 11:28-30).
- As weekly Sabbath rest opens the door to worship of God as Creator, so rest in Christ opens the door to worship of God as Redeemer. Reflection upon creation elicits worship from us, as does our reflection upon Christ.

If you think God’s creation

work was impressive, look to His work at the cross. What glory, what love, what power! Hear heaven’s worship: “Worthy is the Lamb . . . For You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood . . .” (Revelation 5:12, 9). Hear Paul’s boast: “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). All Paul’s glory was in the Beloved’s finished work upon the cross.

Resting in Christ

As Adam and Eve ceased from their labors to enter Sabbath rest, so believers cease from their works to enter the rest of Christ. At a practical level, this means receiving your position as righteous before the Father *by faith*, based on Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is letting go of your works as a means to, and a measure of, your righteousness before God.

Only as believers let go of their own works for salvation can they rest in Christ. If justification

depends on one’s works, rest will never be found (1 John 1:9). Another source of righteousness is needed: Christ alone, as the great hymn “Rock of Ages” affirms:

Nothing in my hand I
bring, / Simply to the cross I
cling.

— Augustus M. Toplady

Worship for the Almighty and the Lamb on heaven’s throne flows from two completed works of God: creation and redemption (Revelation 4:11; 5:9). Let the same perfect works be recognized by true worship on earth!

If we fail to rest in Christ’s finished work, then we will miss true worship of our redeeming God. Instead of worshipping, the restless soul will run from God as did Adam and Eve after they sinned. Our rest in Christ is a catalyst to worship indeed, as it opens the floodgates of praise within our hearts for a holy God for the great works He has done!

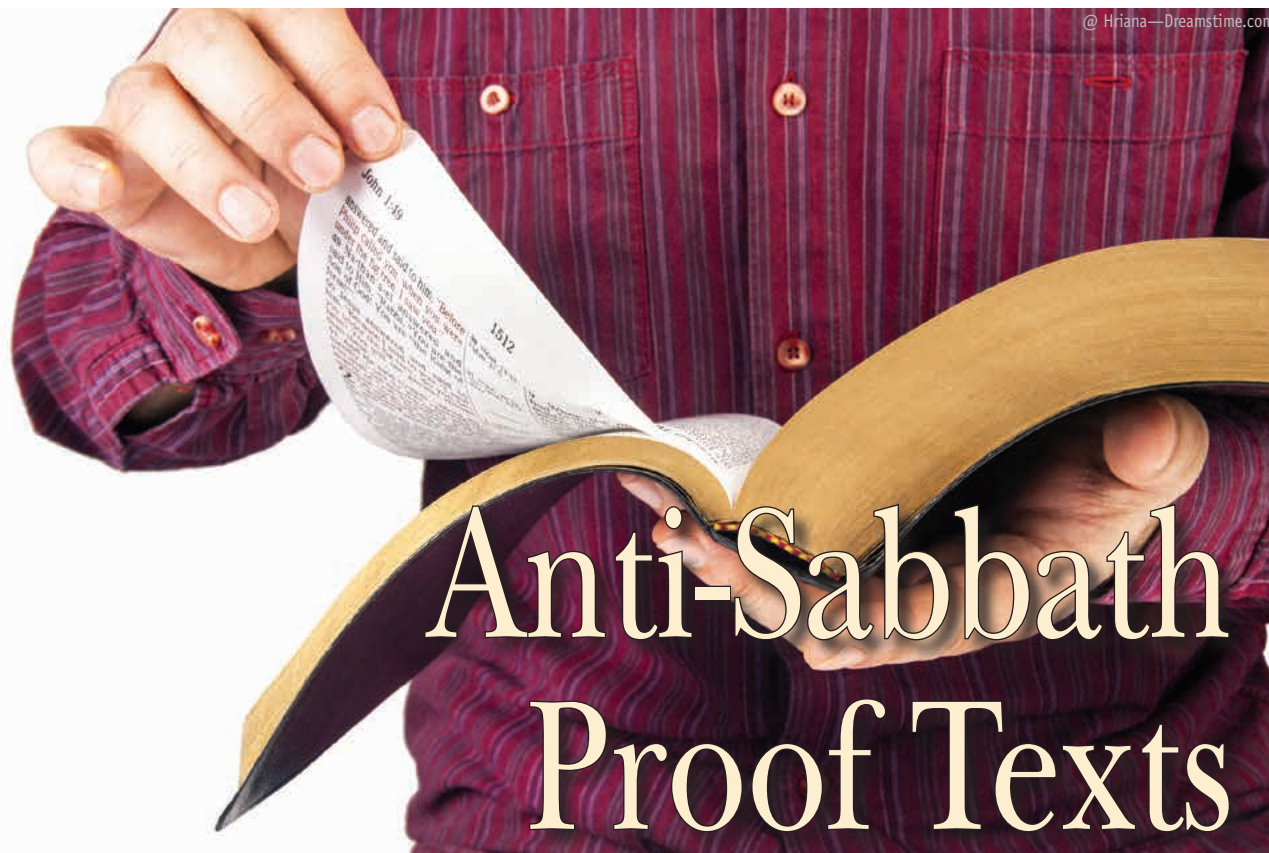
Relevant rest

Sabbath has never been more relevant than it is today. For an ever-restless world, it offers needed physical rest, space and time for reflection upon the incredible works of God. And it paints a timeless picture of our spiritual rest in Christ.

Sabbath is our Divine empowerment, our Divine catalyst and invitation to worship. So let’s rest. Let’s worship! **BA**

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serves the Harris-
burg, OR church as pastor.





Help for serious students on three thorny passages from Paul. **by Israel Steinmetz**

As Sabbatharians we're familiar with three passages that, at face value, seem to oppose Sabbathkeeping:

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain (Galatians 4:9-11).

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a

Sabbath day — things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16, 17).

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind (Romans 14:5).

Loving obedience

Let's take a closer look at each passage, starting with Galatians 4:9-11. Paul wrote to the church in Galatia because, after beginning their spiritual journey in the Spirit, they were trying to be perfected in the flesh (3:3). False teachers had arrived and said they must be circumcised and obey the law in order to be justified. Paul calls this a false gospel (1:6-9). Those who seek to be

justified by the works of the law sever themselves from Christ and fall from grace (5:4). It is in this context that Paul warns the Galatians not to be enslaved to observing a calendar. Those who would observe a calendar as a means of becoming — or remaining — saved have accepted a false gospel. They have placed their faith in their works, rather than in Christ's grace.

But Paul says nothing of those who observe a calendar as a means of showing loving obedience to God, with no thought that such observances save them. Paul wasn't writing to provide a license for sin (v. 13) but to call people to trust in God for their salvation and walk according to the Spirit in love, joy, peace, etc. (v. 22). When we observe the Sabbath in this spirit, God is well pleased.

The message of Galatians 4:9-11 is not to abstain from Sabbath observance but to ensure that we do not become enslaved to it as a means of obtaining — or preserving — our salvation.

Proper place

Now we turn to Colossians, where Paul faced a different heresy — this one more complex than the simple “salvation by works of the law” in Galatia. This heresy combined elements of Greek philosophy and mystery religions with Jewish legalism (2:8, 13, 14). The result was the reduction of Christ into a hierarchy of spiritual forces and the reduction of salvation to rules and rituals.

This false teaching triple-threat was tying the Colossians in knots. In response, Paul unties each thread of the false teaching. He begins by describing Christ’s preeminence (1:13-20) and then moves from one thread to the next as he seeks to disentangle the Colossians. In 2:16, 17 Paul addresses the Jewish legalistic thread and warns them not to accept the false teaching that associates salvation with the observance of days or diet. While the days we observe and the foods we eat can matter to God, they are but a shadow of what is most important: Christ.

The message of Colossians 2:16 is not to elevate anything — be it superstition or commandment keeping — above Christ.

Don’t judge

Finally, we turn to Romans 14, where Paul writes to Christians who have disagreements over matters like eating certain foods and observing certain days. What


foods were debated in the early church? Mostly meat that had been offered to idols (compare 1 Corinthians chapters 8 and 10), although some indication of doubt over unclean meats and wine is also present in Romans 14.

On one hand, Paul sides with the “strong” on the food issue. He considers the differences to be matters of opinion (v. 1) and makes clear that he favors eating meat (v. 14). At the same time, Paul is concerned with weightier matters than simply proving he’s right or flaunting his liberty. He wants the Romans to live together in Christian love, despite their varied convictions. So he tells them to stop judging each other and to trust that God is able to sustain his servants (v. 4). He warns them against contempt for one another, to sacrifice their freedoms in order to serve (vv. 10-15). He prioritizes righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit above dietary questions, and calls them to do the same (vv. 16-21). He instructs believers to follow God with full conviction, behaving as they are convinced God would have them (vv. 5-7, 22, 23). The upshot of all this is that they “accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God” (15:7).

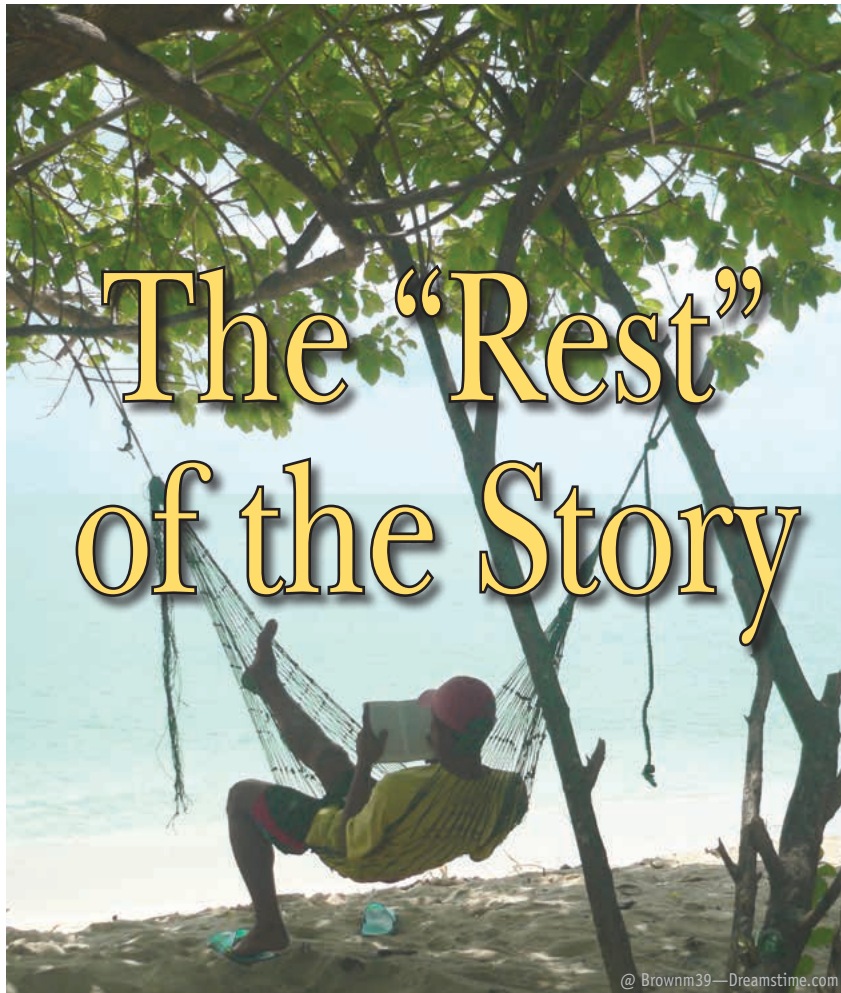
The matter of observing certain days in Romans 14 is more difficult than that of foods, mostly because Paul never says or even suggests which day or days he is referring to in verse 5. It could have been the annual days of feasting or fasting in the Hebrew calendar or secular observances confronting the church. Less likely is that the weekly Sabbath was under debate, inasmuch as little or no evidence exists that Sabbath had become an issue in the church when Romans was written (AD 62). We simply don’t have enough evidence to be certain which day(s) Paul has in mind.

Whatever the case, Paul considers observance, or non-observance, of the day to be a matter about which we should not judge others. In Colossians he warned about the danger of judging based on others’ observance of the Sabbath. Such judgment was mostly related to the belief that observing the day was tied up with salvation — and Paul would have none of that. Observing days, Sabbath or otherwise, is a matter of obedience based on sincere conviction. Those who observe a day in full conviction ought not to be judged by those who do not, for

continued on page 25



Observing days,
Sabbath or
otherwise, is a matter
of obedience based on
sincere conviction.



The "Rest" of the Story

"Seventh Day"?

The phone rings. "Church of God (Seventh Day)," I answer.

"What does that 'Seventh Day' stuff in your church name mean?" asks the voice on the other end.

How do we answer such a question? We might give a lengthy treatise on creation and on the Sabbath being for humanity. We might bring up Mount Sinai and the stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. But here's a novel approach that gets the gospel and the Sabbath across: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from

me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30, NIV).

In this text Jesus describes life with God in the new covenant. It tells what Sabbath was always supposed to be about: soul-nourishing rest, not the burden and guilt of more rules. Sabbath is a standing invitation to fellowship with God and His family. It's not meant for us to sleep the day away or go our own way (Isaiah 58:13) but to worship the Creator-Sustainer of the universe and do ministry.

Too often we are content to gather a short time with the saints on Sabbath, then head

home to do what we want. God, however, looks for bondage to be broken, captives to be freed, the needy to be served, etc. (vv. 6, 7). Jesus illustrated these purposes, like when He healed people on the Sabbath. He shattered the conceptions of generations of Jews on what the Sabbath was by challenging the Pharisees: Isn't it *good* to do *good* on the Sabbath, especially to bring someone to God (Matthew 12:12; Mark 3:4)?

So what can we do to experience the Sabbath as delight, a light and easy load? First, adjust our expectations and attitudes about the day. Sabbath is more about change of pace than about doing nothing. Setting aside our pursuits, labors, and cares can mean "free time" to come into the presence of God. We should be joyful in drawing near to our loving Father undistracted.

Second, don't come alone. Sabbath is a holy convocation of the saints, a weekly celebration for those who've been transformed by the grace of God. We are not saved by the Sabbath; we understand the Sabbath only after we have been saved.

Finally, Sabbath isn't throwing a party with God as guest of honor. It is God sending us out to do ministry and to bring more guests (cf. Matthew 28:18-20). After the church service, we can share the joy, peace, and rest we've just received with the rest of the world. Wouldn't Sabbath afternoon be a great time to cry out to the weary and the lost, "Come home to the Father"?

The next time someone asks you, "What's that 'Seventh Day' thing about?" I hope you can say that it's a blest rest that refills and satisfies the soul with Christ,

once a week. It's part of giving our heavy burdens to Jesus and accepting His rest. May the Sabbath experience in your church relieve the weary and heavy-laden, and send them away rejoicing in the peace and rest they have found in the Creator, Savior, and King.

— Brian Franks
Walla Walla, WA



Misunderstood

The Sabbath may be the most misunderstood of the Ten Commandments because breaking it doesn't seem to harm anybody. We can easily see that having other gods, making graven images, and taking the Lord's name in vain offend God directly. Likewise, dishonoring our parents, killing, committing adultery, stealing, bearing false witness, and coveting can cause pain and suffering to our neighbors.

Breaking the fourth commandment, however, doesn't hurt others; it affects us. It was instituted for our benefit: to rest as God did after His creation work. Besides resting, there are other reasons that keeping Sabbath benefits us — if we understand them.

First, Sabbath is God's reminder that we are His best handiwork. It established a memorial of God's wonderful creation, including man in His own image. Every Sabbath should be a day of joy and gratitude that He esteems us so highly:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is

man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:3-6).

Sabbath reminds us of who we are in God's creation — a wonderful benefit. If we misunderstand our true identity, we will fail to realize how special we are in God's eyes — and perhaps fall into the evolution trap.

Another Sabbath benefit is the gathering of God's people, called a *convocation* (or *assembly*) in Leviticus 23:3. Since God is ever present and we can communicate with Him anytime, He must have a special purpose in having us assemble on the seventh day.

He does. The sin that often prevailed among the Israelites was idolatry — breaking the first commandment. This sin is difficult to be rid of because it's difficult to identify. The Sabbath helps with this as well. If we gather at church but find it hard to enjoy because we'd rather be doing something else, we could have an idol in our lives. We should ask God to remove it so we can enjoy close relationship with Him.

Finally, the Sabbath reminds us of a greater rest: Jesus' rest from our sins. Hebrews 4 says that Israel, for the most part, failed to understand the rest God offered them. God intended Israel to find "rest" from their sin-burdens, but they kept returning to their false gods.

The same thing can happen to us. We can seek other gods to

give us rest from the burden of our sins, but only Jesus can do that (Matthew 11:28).

Yes, the Sabbath is much misunderstood these days, but it doesn't have to be. Understanding and applying *all* the benefits of the Sabbath will keep us close to God in joyous fulfillment of His command.

— Elias Escoto
Madera, CA



Priority

As a young girl, I dreamed of being a nurse — one who helped with mothers and babies. God helped me achieve that dream.

After nursing school and the state board exam, I set out to find a job by applying everywhere. In the interviews, I explained about not being employed on Sabbath. I was willing to work any shift, every Sunday, and holidays, but not from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday.

Nursing directors usually liked my qualifications and wanted to hire me, but told me they couldn't because of my Sabbath convictions. Then I'd go on my way to apply at the next place on my list. Day after day I went home and told my husband that I didn't think I'd ever get hired. He constantly assured me that God would provide just the right job.

God is more than a boss; He is my Lord, and I want to do what He has told me to do. He designed us to need and benefit from a Sabbath rest, and He told us which day that rest day is. Since He is my Lord and Master, I will obey Him without ques-

tion, compromise, or looking for loopholes. I also know that most people do not observe the seventh-day Sabbath, so it wouldn't be impossible for an employer to find someone else who could take the Sabbath shifts. I've heard many testimonies of those who honored their Sabbath convictions and God provided for them, often with an even better job than they had hoped for.

At a tiny hospital in Pomona, California, the interview director said I had the qualifications she was looking for. When I told her about the Sabbath, she hesitated, then said she'd leave the ad in the newspaper two more weeks. If no one answered it, she'd hire me. Since three nursing schools in the area had just graduated a class, I was one of 150 or so new nurses looking for work.

Two weeks went by and *no one* answered the ad!

It was a wonderful first job. I was the only nurse in the labor, delivery, and newborn unit and was in charge of the nursery aide. During that employment, by instruction, observation, and experience, I acquired knowledge of the complications of pregnancy, delivery, care of babies, and their mothers. I thank the Lord for giving me the desire of my heart.

I've had lots more job interviews in the last eighteen years. None of the directors had a problem with my position on Sabbath. Most of them knew of other nurses who didn't work Sabbaths, and they respected our conviction!

— Lois Lemley, RN
Vancouver, WA



Lord's Day

Kyríakos is an interesting Greek word. Used just twice in Scripture, it is translated in both places as "Lord's," meaning "of or belonging to the Lord." In 1 Corinthians 11:20 it refers to the "Lord's Supper" and in Revelation 1:10, to the "Lord's day." The rare use of this word renders it impossible to know with certainty what John was referring to when he said he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (NASB throughout).

Since the second century, many Christians have understood this phrase to refer to the first day of the week. They believe that Christ made the day sacred by rising and appearing to His disciples and by sending His Spirit on this day. For them, the most significant day related to "the Lord" was Sunday.

We question this interpretation. Neither Christ nor the apostles ever attached sacred significance to the day of the week on which Christ rose (which we believe to be the Sabbath) or to the first day of the week. We note that the earliest historical record of Christians assembling regularly on Sunday comes *after* the New Testament era,* a time during which all historians agree that many Christians (particularly Jewish converts) continued observing the seventh-day Sabbath.

If "the Lord's day" in Revelation 1:10 is not Sunday, to what does it refer? We might interpret it as "the day of the Lord" referenced in various Old Testament prophecies (e.g., Isaiah 13:6; Eze-

kiel 30:3; Obadiah 1:15). Given the nature of John's apocalyptic visions in Revelation, this theory is interesting. However, the eschatological "day of the Lord" occurs in several New Testament texts (Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10), and none of them use *kyriakos*, opting instead for the typical genitive case "of the Lord" to describe Him as the possessor of "the day."

So what is the "Lord's day"? Consider this evidence in favor of identifying it as the seventh-day Sabbath.

The Sabbath was the first thing God made holy (Genesis 2:3; cf. Exodus 20:11; Isaiah 58:13), and it was called the "Sabbath of the LORD" in the Decalogue (Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14). More significantly, Christ taught that He was "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). We recognize Christ as Lord of all, but the only day He ever spoke of in this way was the seventh. For these reasons, we associate "the Lord's day" with Sabbath. How appropriate that John was in the Spirit on this day! **BA**

— Israel Steinmetz
San Antonio, TX

* Acts 20:7 makes no mention of a habitual gathering on Sunday, and 1 Corinthians 16:2 refers to setting aside money, not assembling together.

by **Manasseh Mark Bombeo**

I wasn't always as enthusiastic about the Sabbath as I am today. Twenty-five years ago, I thought Sabbath was just another word for church — something I did with my *lola* (Filipino for *grandmother*). I always greeted the day as her chaperone, carrying things for her, hearing her hum old hymns, and wondering what went through her mind. As we walked toward the terminal where we caught our ride to church, her arms wrapped around me and her hands gently tapped my shoulder as she hummed.

Whenever I tried to run outside with other kids during service, my grandmother grabbed my hand, pointed at the preacher, and whispered, "Listen." It was big people stuff for me, but something was really happening in my grandmother. She'd nod at the preacher's words and sometimes utter her own. I asked her, "What is it?" She would just smile and run her fingers through my hair as if to say, "You'll see soon enough."

Being a teenager on Sabbath was different. *lola* insisted I go with a youth group I hardly knew. After church she treated me to my favorite burger and spaghetti, and we'd talk about what happened during FYC.

Age was catching up to her. I began to notice her wrinkles and freckles, but her gentle voice and warmth didn't change. When I was home from college, we chatted and she laughed at my jokes. Little did I know her journey was almost up. After a few days in the hospital, my grandmother breathed her last — on my birthday.



My grandmother was my guiding light, my loving mentor. Now she was gone. What would life be without her?

The first Sabbath after her death was tough. I walked around like a zombie. After weeks and then months, I recovered and found God most real in a day that was dear to my grandmother: the Sabbath. She was gone, but the source of her songs reentered my life. I began seeing through her eyes. I never regret having found consolation in God.

The Sabbath offers more than moments of religious activity. It provides a binding for our wounds, comfort for our sorrows — even a hand on our shoulder. It's a chance to start afresh, to shed the stuff that weighs us down, to cast our burdens upon the One who can help. Human efforts can cover wounds only a little. But with God's gentle voice, in His loving hand and warm heart, we walk in joy.

I remember that moment in

church long ago, when I asked my grandmother what was she saying to the preacher. They were talking about a verse in Ecclesiastes 3 that says God has set a time and a place for everything — a time to be nurtured, a time to be a child, a time to weep, and a time to be sober and grow into the knowledge of His love. Now I realize how great God is.

My *lola's* favorite scripture was "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). She lived by this verse and was laid to rest with it. How I choose to live honors her and brings her smile to God's face. Even now, I'm much closer to my *lola* when I come into God's presence — on His holy Sabbath day. **BA**

Manasseh Mark Bombeo is an ordained missionary serving the Philippine Conference through the church in Cagayan de Oro City.



Sabbath —

As followers of Jesus Christ, we keep and observe



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Fundamental grounds. Basically, Sabbath started as a holy memorial of creation. When the Lord finished His six days of labor making the heavens, the earth, and all they contain, He declared it very good and rested the seventh day as an example. All time is God's time, and no other day was ever hallowed by the Creator for the awesome work He had done the first six days. Thus the weekly Sabbath is a creation ordinance. Along with work and marriage, it was in God's best plan for humanity even before sin entered the world (Genesis 2:2, 3).

Gospel grounds. The example and teaching of the Lord Jesus support the Sabbath. His custom was to keep the day rightly, rescuing it from Jewish legalism. Not a mere rule to be obeyed, the new covenant Sabbath is for the world. Ceasing our labor on the Sabbath reminds us that salvation is not our finished work in our behalf. Why did Jesus continue the Sabbath custom? Was there no change to another day? Why do we have a day so full of grace? What need is there for another day? (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Hebrews 4:9-11; 18:4)?

Like a valuable item finds sturdy support on a stool with three stout legs, so the Sabbath enjoys stable support in three powerful Scripture sources: in Creation, in the moral law, and in Jesus Christ's example and teaching.

precious gift of God

the Bible's seventh-day Sabbath. Here's why. . . .

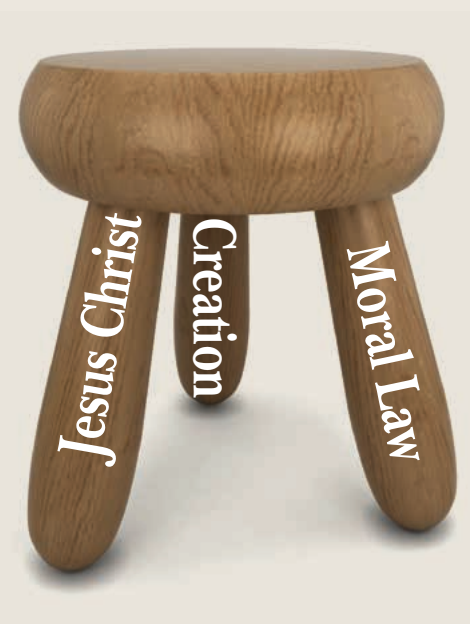


is God's restful gift to a restless
the seventh day as God did
not by our works but by Christ's
That's grace! The early church
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:1-11; Acts 13:42, 44; 17:2;



Covenantal grounds.
Early on, the Sabbath took a central place in the Decalogue, the moral core of God's covenant with Israel: "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy." Among the commandments spoken by Yahweh at Sinai and written by His finger on stone, none of the Ten was deleted when God renewed His covenant in Christ. His enduring laws are now written, not on tables of stone but on the tables of our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Exodus 20:8-11; Hebrews 8:10; 10:15, 16).

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Any one of these alone would be enough to make the point; together, they establish an invincible trio: "a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12b). **BA**

Jesus on the Sabbath

Explore our Lord's decisive words and actions regarding the seventh day. **by Israel Steinmetz**

Growing up in Sabbathkeeping churches, I've heard hundreds of sermons dealing, directly or indirectly, with Sabbath. Most of these didn't say much about Jesus and the Sabbath. Rather, they provided theological base, arguments for observance, and Sabbath rules

from the Old Testament. From these sermons alone, one could suspect that Jesus rarely mentioned the Sabbath, that it was mostly an old covenant fixture.

But fifty of the sixty-plus New Testament references to Sabbath are in the four Gospels, where Jesus is at the center of Sabbath

action or speaks to the Sabbath issue. Most or all Sabbath instruction in the New Testament comes from Christ's teachings. By studying what Jesus said and did on the Sabbath, we understand how He fulfilled it. As the initiator and embodiment of the new covenant, Jesus could have said that Sabbath should be forgotten, treated as common. But He did not! Rather, He talked about Sabbath as a day to be observed in a given way — by Himself and by His followers.

So what did Jesus say and do on the Sabbath? And what might we learn from Him regarding what it means to observe the Sabbath in a new covenant context? In other words, how can we ensure that our Sabbath observance is Christ centered?

Jesus' Sabbath practice

Jesus' most common Sabbath activity was His habitual attendance and teaching in the synagogue. On the Sabbath He also healed often, taught outside the synagogue, ate with friends, and walked through grain fields. Taken together, these incidents provide a basic picture of Jesus' Sabbath practice (e.g., Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 1:21-31; 6:2; Luke 4:16, 31; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-18; 9:1-16).

Jesus' Sabbath practice was marked by active engagement with God's covenant people in corporate worship. It was characterized by compassion in the form of valuing people — hungry or in need of healing — over rigid stipulations. And it included leisure in the form of a meal with friends or a countryside stroll.

As important as His conduct was, it was Jesus' teaching on the

Sabbath that underscored the theological basis and meaning of His actions.

Jesus' Sabbath teaching

It is expressed in a few profound statements, aimed mostly at religious leaders who antagonized Jesus and His disciples for breaking the Sabbath. Jesus never denied their allegations or defended His actions based on the law. Rather, He obliquely admitted that His disciples were breaking the letter of Sabbath law or Jewish traditions prevalent in that day. Ultimately, He taught the true significance of the Sabbath in relation to Himself and others.

Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus' most controversial claim about Sabbath was that it was under His authority. His disciples were caught in the act of harvesting and threshing grain for food on the Sabbath, considered a violation of Sabbath law by the Pharisees (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5). Rather than say His disciples didn't break the law, Jesus cited David breaking the tabernacle law and the fact that priests working in the temple profaned the Sabbath but were innocent. He reminded the Pharisees of compassion's priority over religious ritual with His statement "I desire mercy and not sacrifice."

Then He said it: "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." This claim is foundational to everything else Jesus taught about Sabbath. It means that Jesus has the right to give, interpret, and rewrite Sabbath law. It means that He decides whether one who commits unlawful Sabbath activity is guilty or innocent. The

disciples were in the presence of One greater than the temple, and He found no fault in their actions. If the Lord found no fault, why should the servants cast blame?

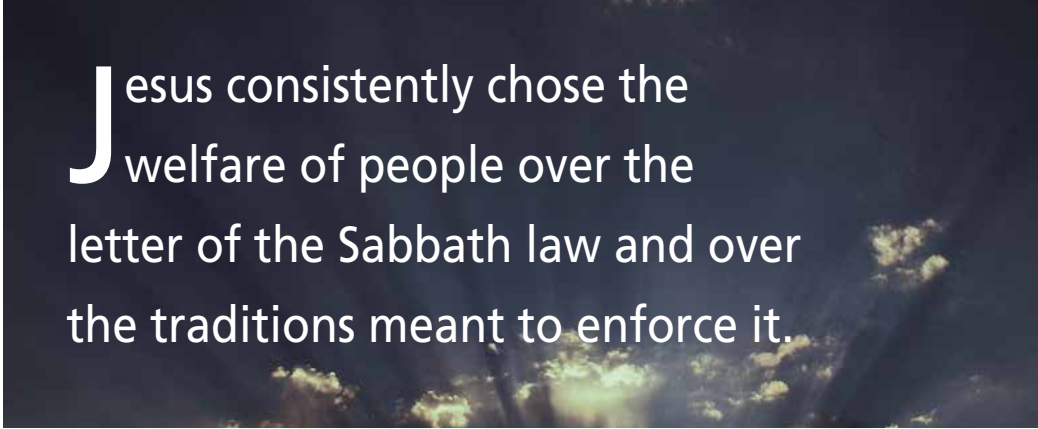
Recognizing Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath is fundamental to understanding and keeping Sabbath. All too often we have subjected Jesus to Sabbath laws and claimed that He upheld them in the face of religious leaders misapplying them. But the Gospels tell a different story. Jesus was the one reinterpreting Torah law, while the Pharisees were upholding its literal application. He could do this only if He was Lord of the Sabbath, not if the Sabbath was Lord of Him. Because Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, we must listen carefully to what He says on the topic.

Sabbath and humanity. If we wonder why Jesus was eager to excuse His disciples for food preparation and the sick for coming to be healed and for carrying their beds home, we need look no further than Mark's account of what Jesus said that day in the grain field. Just before claiming lordship of the Sabbath, Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). This claim

places the priority of people over the day.

Humans are the crown and stewards of God's creation, the bearers of His image (Genesis 1:26-31). The Sabbath is a gift for them, not the other way around. The Sabbath is a compassionate gift to people who are weary and need rest, foreshadowing Jesus (Matthew 11:28). Sabbath is a merciful reminder that capitalism is not king; life consists of more than production, possessions, and profit. The Sabbath is an extension of God's grace; as such, it should always be used for people's welfare. Thus, Jesus consistently chose the welfare of people over the letter of the Sabbath law and over the traditions meant to enforce it.

Jesus decreed that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:12; cf. Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9). Such a broad statement is not found in the law, particularly the way in which Jesus intended it. Like His Father, Jesus was actively *working* on Sabbath (John 5:17). It was not the customary work of creation week; this was completed in six days. Rather it was the work of serving and saving people. His example is significant for us: We are called to join God in setting



Jesus consistently chose the welfare of people over the letter of the Sabbath law and over the traditions meant to enforce it.

aside the customary work of the week. But we are also called to continue “working” on Sabbath — the good work of actively serving and loving people.

Several of Jesus’ statements underscore the importance of this good work. His most familiar Sabbath teaching may be in reference to the custom of helping animals as a basis for helping people on that day (Matthew 12:11-12; Luke 13:15-16; 14:3-5). He argues from the lesser to the greater: If you’d be willing to work by serving (water) or saving (from a pit) an animal on the Sabbath, then how could you refuse to serve or save a person?

These verses are often cited as exception clauses, allowing people to help themselves or others in emergencies. But that’s not what Jesus was saying. None of Jesus’ actions that He defended with this principle were emergencies. Rather, they were acts of service and salvation that could have waited until the next day. Such a delay, in fact, is what the religious leaders wanted (Luke 13:14). Jesus’ point was not that we could break the Sabbath for an occasional emergency but that the only way to truly keep Sabbath was to actively use it in service to others. Helping people on Sabbath — even when it re-

quires work — is not an exception. It is the rule.

Jesus’ teaching calls us to be thoughtful in the way we observe Sabbath. If our list of do’s and don’ts ends up hurting — or fails to help — people, then we’re not observing the day as Jesus intended. Rather than rely on the face-value appearance of an action as “work,” we must make a righteous judgment in determining appropriate Sabbath activity (John 7:19-24).

Christ-centered Sabbath observance

For our Sabbath observance to be Christ centered, it would need to be shaped by Jesus’ example and teaching on the Sabbath. From my reflection on what He said and did, here’s what this might look like.

The Sabbath must be kept in proper perspective to Jesus. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and is pre-eminent in all things (Colossians 1:18). Our faith and practice must find their center in Christ, not the Sabbath. To put it another way, our identity must be focused more on being “Church of God” than on being “Seventh Day.” It is idolatry to elevate the Sabbath above Christ.

Some Sabbath time should be

reserved for assembly with other followers of Christ. Jesus habitually attended synagogue on Sabbath, thus demonstrating His commitment to corporate worship with the public reading and teaching of Scripture. It was one way in which He answered the old covenant call for a “holy convocation,” or gathering, on the Sabbath (Leviticus 23:3). When we meet together on Sabbath around the Word and worship, we are following Jesus’ good example, and we benefit from the practice.

The Sabbath must be kept in proper perspective to people. The Sabbath was made for humanity, not the other way around. The Sabbath is intended to serve us; we are not intended to serve it. When Sabbath observance becomes its own form of servile labor through a list of rules and rituals, we are no longer keeping it as Jesus intends. The Sabbath should afford us opportunity to rest, to remember and reflect, to relax and recreate. This includes activities like taking a walk or enjoying a meal with friends. It’s true that Jesus went to synagogue on Sabbath, but He didn’t live there. We must be careful not to judge others who keep Sabbath differently than we. Let us not join the chorus of Jesus’ foes who insisted that those who treated the Sabbath differently could not be of God (John 9:16). It is disobedience to elevate the Sabbath above people.

The Sabbath should be set aside for the special work of serving and saving people. Whenever possible, this should include cessation from our customary work to allow us to focus on finding

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When we meet together on Sabbath around the Word and worship, we are following Jesus’ good example.

by Andrew Fernandez

Some people claim that we who keep Sabbath on the seventh day are legalistic, exchanging God's grace for law, earning salvation by works. But Isaiah 58 tells a different story — that Sabbath is a grace of God bestowed on humanity.

Why was this grace needed when Isaiah wrote? Because of the Israelites' sin (vv. 1-5): They had not only neglected the poor and needy but also treated God as if He were some kind of vending machine that spits out blessings in return for religious rituals.

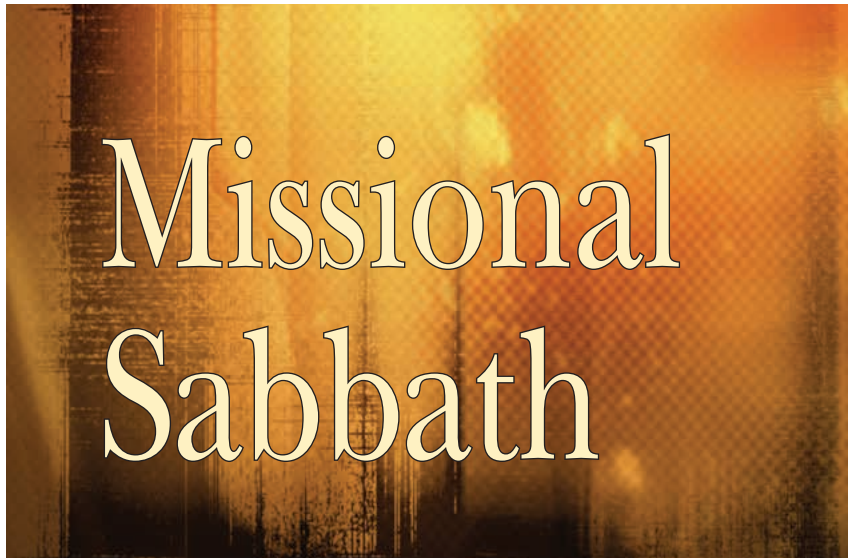
Then God points out what He instead desires from His people. He wants them to loose bonds of wickedness, undo heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, break every yoke, share bread with the hungry, take in the poor and homeless, and clothe the naked (vv. 6, 7).

This list covers both physical and spiritual needs. God delivered Israel from slavery and called them to be a beacon of hope to a world in sin-bondage. Sadly, they failed to extend this hope to others, even in their own nation.

Now see what God promises to those who do what He asks:

- He will answer their cries for help.
- They'll be a light in darkness.
- He will satisfy their souls, strengthen their bones, and guide them continually.
- They'll be like a watered garden that doesn't dry up.
- They'll rebuild the destroyed places, be a foundation for many generations, and be called repairer of the breach and restorer of cities (vv. 8-12).

These are awesome promises.



God will answer our prayers, send light in the ugliest situations, and bring peace into chaos and devastation. Using us to do that for others is even more amazing.

Many sermons on Isaiah 58 stop at verse 12. But in verse 13 God says something we often miss. He includes Sabbath in the ingredients of what looks a lot like Christ's ministry and teachings. Compare Matthew 11:28-30 with Isaiah 58:1-12.

Our worship services are only half of what it means to keep Sabbath — maybe less. We also need to give help in the myriad of troubles people face, and pass the same blessings to others who never enter the church.

Many people struggle with emotional, mental, and spiritual burdens for years. They need rest from that work too. The Sabbath is an opportunity to bring it to them — to be about God's redemptive work. God has given us six days for our own business. The seventh day was made to rest from that and to make time for God's business: helping the lost and needy.

The result of delight in the

Sabbath is delight in the Lord himself (vv. 13, 14). Missional Israelites would delight in Him. He would cause them to ride on the high hills of the earth and feed them with the heritage of Jacob — two promises that would have excited Israel.

Then comes the chapter's end: "The mouth of the Lord has spoken." It seems God wanted to emphasize Sabbath's important place in His desires for love, grace, and compassion among His people and their ministry to the world.

Sabbath is a gift, not only for rest from physical work but also for spiritual rest in Christ, rest from labor to earn salvation. And it is missional, a holistic rest that God wants to extend to others — through us. **BA**

Andrew Fernandez, alumnus and former director of LITES (Leaders in Training for Evangelism and Service), now serves the St. Joseph, MO church as pastor.





Radical Changes

by Robert Coulter

The congregational polity adopted by the Church of God (Seventh Day) one hundred fifty-seven years ago recognizes the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9), encourages use of spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6-8), and models New Testament congregationalism (Titus 1:5).

The success or failure of a church does not depend on its polity. The Southern Baptist Convention, the largest Protestant denomination in North America, gives its members complete autonomy. Our Seventh-day Adventist brethren operate under a centralized, if not hierarchical, polity, with a membership of several million. While the polities of these churches differ, their parallel successes lie in articulating vision, building support for the vision, and working that vision.

It seems unfortunate that the Church (CoG7) is being asked to exchange its congregational polity for a governing hierarchy on the basis that it will lead us to greater unity and success. As a member of the Bylaws Revision Committee appointed in 2013, I hold a minority opinion on its proposals. In this article, I will examine the most problematic provisions and omissions of the proposed bylaws.

Provisions

The entire bylaw document (Article II, paragraph A of the bylaws, paragraph 2 of its Preamble, in particular) gives preeminence to the General Conference over the Church of God (Seventh Day). The Church and its Conference share the same membership but serve it in different ways. The Church worships, evangelizes, converts, and instructs members in the Bible and encourages their spiritual maturity every Sabbath. Congregational pastors serve the members by calling on them, praying for the sick, performing weddings, conducting funerals, and consoling the bereaved. The General Conference, the

Church's service arm, cannot and does not perform those services, since it has no pastoral staff and only meets biennially.

The phrase "With Christ as its head, the Conference exists . . ." (paragraph 2) conflicts with Bible teaching and the Church's *Statement of Faith*: "The church of God in Scripture is a spiritual body of believers. . . ." The Bible identifies Christ as the head of a spiritual body, His church, but never of an organization (Colossians 1:18).

Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Preamble disagree on the Conference's objectives. In paragraph 2 the Conference erroneously assumes the identity of the Church, while in 3 it is rightfully portrayed as providing services.

The current bylaws confer all Conference authority, except *amending* bylaws, on its board of directors when it is not in session (Article IV, Section 4, A). But they never authorize the board to regulate and manage the Church's congregations. The proposed bylaws, however, make the board and its employed president (Article 4, Section 4, B, 2) a hierarchy empowered to impose the provisions of the bylaws on the Church's membership "without limitation" (Preamble, General Norms, Applicability).

Additionally, the Conference board and its president are authorized to review congregational documents and practices with authority to "abrogate, amend or supplement all contrary law, organizing documents, bylaws and customs of ecclesiastical entities and structures [congregations] affiliated with the Conference regardless of whether they were developed by them earlier or later than these Bylaws" (Supremacy).

These paragraphs facilitate the imposition of Article VIII on the Church's congregations by 2017 (Enabling Resolution). No provisions are made for the cultural practices of the Church's ethnic membership, or exceptions for fully compliant congrega-

tions that were organized decades ago. It is a “one size fits all” organizational plan requiring the reorganization of every congregation.

Further, when congregations reorganize, they must submit their organizational documents to their district superintendents to be certified in conformity with the Church’s doctrine and bylaws (Article VIII, Section 1, E, 1-3).

District boards will no longer serve as co-administrators with superintendents of their districts. Under Article IX, districts are “. . . under the leadership (administration) of the Conference Board, the President, and a superintendent and district board” (Article IX, Section 1, A; Section 2, A-G; Section 3, C, 1-4). District boards are retained under the proposed revisions, but their administrative assignments are minimal (Article IX, Section 4, A-F; Article III, Section 5, D).

District superintendents will become Conference employees (Article IV, Section 1, B) and resident administrators, of districts (Article IV, Section 4, B, 3; Article IX, Section 3, C, 1-4). They are authorized to intervene in the affairs of congregations and supervise “congregational leaders” (Article IX, Section 2, C). They must be consulted before a congregation employs its pastor (Article VIII, Section 1, D, 1, b).

District boards are to consult with the Conference president on potential candidates for their superintendents (Article IX, Section 3, B), but his report and nominations to the Conference board are verbal and without further district participation. To require that the president’s report and nominations be written and distributed to district boards would have added integrity and transparency to this process, but the committee declined this proposal.

Omissions

This illustrates a point about these bylaws. They require little in the way of accountability from the Conference board and its president and place few limits on their authority to act unilaterally toward membership. They make little or no provision for members or districts to participate in the board’s/president’s decision-making process, engage it in dialogue, call for accountability and transparency, or seek redress or arbitration.

The bylaws ignore their parliamentary authority’s stipulation that the duties of the Conference’s executive officer (president) be listed in the bylaws. *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised* says, “. . . in many organized societies, the president has duties as an administrative or executive officer; but these are outside the scope of parliamentary law, and the president has such authority only insofar as the bylaws provide it” (Chapter XV, Officers: Minutes and Officers’ Reports, *Administrative duties of the president of a society*). In lieu of listing his duties in the bylaws, the president is supposed to receive a job description from the board.

Traditionally, district superintendents have been paid by their districts, as district employees. If they become employees of, and receive their instructions from, the Conference board and its president (Article IX, Section 1, A; Section 2, G; Section 3, C, 2, 3), they should be placed on the Conference payroll. However, a provision to include districts’ expenses in the Conference’s budget was omitted (Article IV, Section 4, B, 7) – with the intent that districts will continue to compensate superintendents who will then be Conference employees.

This plan violates the bylaws. The Conference’s major fund source is 15 percent of total tithes from the membership (Article XI, Section 2, C). District funds are also tithe-derived (Article XI, Section 2, B; Section 3, A, 1). Therefore, district-funded superintendents give the Conference an additional tithe income over its limitation of 15 percent, in the form of salary subsidies.

When I consider the godlessness and turmoil in the world and the nearness of our Lord’s return, I pray God to forgive us for the excessive investment of the Church’s time and resources in revising bylaws when they could have been used to declare, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” Jesus saves!

Robert and Ida Coulter make their home in Thornton, CO.



Viewpoint Responses



Viewpoints on these pages continue what began in two previous BAs. Each item represents one member's opinion on issues facing the Church in transition. To be heard on these topics in the July-August convention BA, e-mail your comments by May 17 to bibleadvocate@cog7.org. Maximum 250 words, please. — Editor

The viewpoints expressed by Chairman Loren Stacy in the March-April BA deserve serious consideration. The growth of the Church calls for a representative system whereby the local congregations are free to control their activities and promote their beliefs, but doing so within the precepts established by their elected representatives serving as delegates or officers at the Conference level. A wide-open system allowing each unit to go its own way promotes doctrinal error and leads to community accusations of being a cult. That reflects badly on the Church as a whole.

— Don Wilson

While the present bylaws are far from satisfactory, the proposed revision takes structure in the wrong direction. In the current bylaws, there is no mention of establishing doctrine or of punishing anyone who may disagree with doctrinal positions of the General Conference. In the revision, establishing the power

of the Conference to make and enforce a doctrinal creed seems to be of primary importance. The phrase “studies and establishes doctrine” (Preamble, fourth paragraph) sets a tone different from the old bylaws. Under General Norms, the first paragraph suggests that Ministerial Council doctrine is equal in importance to Scripture. Other paragraphs indicate that the bylaws and doctrines are supreme and completely binding.

Upholding the doctrinal beliefs of the Conference is listed as a qualification for membership. While many may find this reasonable, it is ironic that this clause could be used to prevent discussion on future doctrinal change. Or discussion could be limited to approved “progressive” directions only. On page 18, section F, one cause for local church dissolution is teaching doctrine contrary to the Conference.

Many think it is wrong to disagree with the Ministerial Council on doctrine and that Conference leadership should be equipped with the means to remove dissenters. These new bylaws will be exactly that. (In the interest of disclosure, I am one opposed to the Church's current position on the identity of Christ as found in *This We Believe*.)

Power imbalance is what makes the [proposed] delegate voting system unsuitable. The current Conference convention system is already imbalanced in favor of those who make their living with the Church. Other members cannot leave work and fam-

ily duties to go to convention, so voting is already tilted heavily in favor of Conference personnel. A delegate system would indeed be more fair, but the ex-officio voting rights of Conference officials should be removed. Conference personnel should not have voting rights when other members vote only through their delegates. All members should be equally represented through their congregation or district delegates. Already the convention and agenda are organized and run by Conference leaders.

— Robert M. (Mitch) Crisp

There were so many conferences I attended where I asked myself, *Why are so few people governing so large a denomination?* I respect the leadership God has placed in this body of Christ. When the body votes [at convention], so few are able to attend. Why not get the opinion of the whole church? I'm all for the proposal of Brother Stacy.

— Clyde Thompson

Regarding Loren Stacy's comments on the proposed delegate system, I am neither “afraid” that I won't be chosen as a delegate, nor do I “think that those who are not in attendance don't deserve a voice.” As a Christian, I hope to depend on the Holy Spirit's leading as I vote, rather

Anti-Sabbath Proof Texts


continued from page 11

than being “guided only by [their] personal preference,” as he states voters in the past have been.

In 2013 the members voted to form an investigative committee to determine the feasibility of electronic voting, which could allow every member to have an individual vote without having to attend convention. If the goal is for all to have a voice, [that] could be the perfect solution. I won’t vote for a delegate system until I hear the findings of that committee.

In any delegate system, the individual’s voice is heard only *if* his delegate votes in agreement with the member’s wishes. Under the system proposed in the revised bylaws, members will be represented by a delegate only *if* they belong to a church in financial “compliance” with the General Conference (as defined by the proposed bylaws) or *if* they are members-at-large who tithe to the Church. Further, the proposed system would give several non-delegate members (board and committee members, G. C. personnel, etc.) an individual vote in addition to being represented by a delegate. That unfair provision only reinforces the “us” and “them” mentality mentioned by Mr. Stacy.

— *Miriam Dixon*

 *Other opinions and the full-length versions of these are available at baonline.org.*

they observe it to the Lord. And those who do not observe a day because of full conviction ought not to be judged by those who do (Romans 14:5, 6).

Does this mean all days are created equal, like meat and vegetables? Paul doesn’t go that far. He does insist that it’s God’s role to make His servants stand, rather than fall, before Him (v. 4). God brings conviction to His servants who need it and trains them in righteousness. While holding firm to our convictions, we should commit ourselves to accepting and serving one another, rather than judging, condemning, and dividing. Whatever day Paul was talking about in Romans 14, the message remains the same for Sabbatharians and non-Sabbatharians: Be convinced in your own mind, but don’t destroy one (for whom Christ died) for the sake of a day.

So it is that these three texts are not anti-Sabbath after all. They are, however, a caution to us as Sabbatharians. For our Sabbathkeeping to honor God, we must ensure that it is an act of loving obedience, rather than an attempt to be justified by the law. And we must ensure that Christ is always elevated above the Sabbath, which includes allowing Christ — and not the observance of a day — to be the judge of our brothers and sisters in Christ. **BA**

Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

Jesus on the Sabbath

continued from page 20

rest for ourselves and providing rest for others. Two potential exceptions come to my mind. First, like the temple priests, like farmers who tend animals, and like parents who care for their children, there are those whose customary work is still necessary to Sabbathkeeping. Those whose work is devoted to the Church’s corporate worship and to serving and saving others should be encouraged to do their Sabbath work — and be paid for it.

Second, unlike ancient Israel, we do not live in a closed society in which all business can pause on Sabbath. To honor Jesus’ words of placing mercy above sacrifice, essential life services must be provided seven days a week. And when life presents us with the choice of providing for our family or resting, Jesus’ teaching prioritizes the basic needs of people over Sabbath.

Conspicuously absent here is an official list of “do’s and don’ts” for Sabbath observance. This is intentional. Jesus did not provide His followers with such a list. Rather, He taught and exemplified a principle-based Sabbath observance with Christ as its Lord and people as its beneficiaries. May our Sabbath observance be increasingly characterized by these two principles. **BA**

Israel Steinmetz serves as dean of Academic Affairs for LifeSpring School of Ministry.



A photograph of a sunrise over a mountain range. The sun is low on the horizon, partially obscured by clouds, creating a bright glow and lens flare. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and red. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of evergreen trees are visible against the lighter sky.

Early Light

My wife wakes early and walks
up the hill toward the splendor.
Stopping at the peak, she sees
all the greens – the evergreens –
as maple, pine, and cedar
sway and play for position,
for her recognition.

Beams, rays, and corridors
of gold, orange, and yellow
light her moment of certainty,
serenity,
and God.

She takes a slow deep drink
of cold morning air
and sails home to me
(just barely making coffee).
I see the sun in her smile
telling me what I missed,
filling my cup with more colors
than van Gogh at Arles.

Stephen Keller



CoG7 In Action



Photos by Amber Schlenker, from 2014 Dakota Youth Retreat



National Youth Ministry

Need to find God and His plan? We know just the place: camp. It does a body good – without the milk mustache!

The youth camp experience is what you need to “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). It took the Israelites 40 years in the desert to figure out God’s plan for their lives. We can help you get a great start in just a week away from the world and its distractions.

2015 Summer Camps

Convention Youth Program

June 29 – July 4, Milwaukee, WI;
Kurt and Kristi Lang, directors
(youth@cog7.org)

Central California Junior and Senior Camp

July 6-12, Capital Mountain Camp, Weimar, CA; contact: blgomez02@gmail.com or levivanfossen@yahoo.com

Michigan Youth Camp

July 12-19, Yankee Springs, Long Lake Outdoor Center, near Hastings, MI; contact: coulson.a.n@gmail.com

SIS-Q Meadows Senior Camp (ages 13-18)

July 19-26, Cave Junction, OR; contact: haffnerg@earthlink.net

Arizona Youth Camp

July 20-26, Emmanuel Pines Camp, Prescott, AZ; contact: steve.vanderwarf@srpnet.com

Southern CA Senior Camp

July 21-26, Camp Cedar Falls, Angelus Oaks, CA; contact: kingdomwork2030@yahoo.com

SIS-Q Meadows Junior Camp (ages 8-12)

July 26 - August 2, Cave Junction, OR; contact: mattngo@peoplepc.com

SWD Summer Get Away

July 30 – August 2, Conroe, TX; contact: jandrrodriguez@att.net

Dakota Youth Retreat

August 5-9, Crystal Springs Baptist Camp, Medina, ND; contact: jandw@centurylink.net

Find out about these and other camps, how you can attend, or how to sponsor a youth to attend. Contact National Youth Ministry at youth.cog7.org (Calendar page).

—  —
SEE YOU THERE!
—  —



SVA Seniors. Front row, L to R: Alyah Guerrero (Austin, TX); Alexandria Albert (Owosso, MI); Lauren Caswell (Owosso, MI); Elizet Mendoza (Granger, WA); Jewel Mowatt (Bronx, NY).

Middle row, L to R: Guo Songze (Kuitun, Xijiang, China); Colby Hinds (Independence, MO); Christopher Acosta (Walla Walla, WA); Molly Santistevan (Arvada, CO); Hadassah Albert (Owosso, MI).

Back row, L to R: Juan Marquez (Round Rock, TX); Matthew Nienhuis (Galt, CA); Josiah Carbajal (Maplewood, MN); Hannah Baker (Clackamas, OR); Benjamin Noble (Owosso, MI); Adam Slawson (Owosso, MI); Matthew Miller (Buffalo, MO); Kyle Schmitz (Perry, MI).



Graduation Weekend: May 22-24

Baccalaureate: May 23, 11:00 a.m.

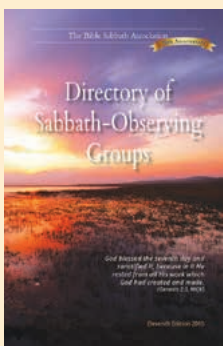
Commencement: May 24, 10:00 a.m.

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From LifeSpring to license:

Sergio Alfaro (center) of Houston, TX, holds the LifeSpring certificate awarded him in February. Assisting in the presentation are (L to R) Pastor Jhabel Chagollan, Superintendent "Chip" Hinds, Dennis O'Banion, and Francisco Camarillo — all churchmen of the Houston-Conroe, TX area. Chagollan is a member of the Church's License and Credentials Committee, which recently approved the following:

Ministerial licenses for Sergio Alfaro of Houston; Jody Crowson of Eugene, OR; Israel Delgado, transfer from Uruguay into North-east District; Tim Hinds of Kansas City, MO; Ismael Martinez of Norcross, GA; Paul Pedersen of Tacoma, WA; and Isai Urizar of Laval, Quebec.

Local pastor certificates for Dirk Anderson of Jacksonville, FL; Keith Legg of Ft. Myers, FL; Jose Mata of Severn, MD; Yair Moreno of Winchester, VA; Benjamin Ramirez of Stockton, CA; and Samuel Santos of Laval, Quebec.

Appointment Announced

As Central District superintendent: Elder Glen Palmer of Denver, CO (effective March 1).



Missions-minded: *Shamas Pervaiz of Pakistan, Bryan Cleeton of Colorado, and Tluang Kung of Myanmar met in Malaysia recently to explore planting the Church among Pakistani and Burmese refugee families living in Kuala Lumpur.*

CoG7 Calendar

SW SWORD Retreat, Hawkins, TX - May 29-31 (sword@cog7.org)

Dover Family Camp near Kingfisher, OK - June 14-21

General Conference Convention, Milwaukee, WI - June 29 – July 4

XXVIII Annual Hispanic Ladies' Retreat, Long Beach, CA - September 4-7; contact: Aseneth Orduño (310-930-0054)

Sis-Q Meadows Senior Adult Retreat, Cave Junction, OR - September 9-13; contact: aaron.henderson@marioncog7.org

Southwest District Women's Retreat, Camp Hoblitzelle, Midlothian, TX - October 30 - November 1; register by September 18; contacts: 361-739-1147; mrdavila@hotmail.com or 361-960-4423; marise.lacummings@hotmail.com

Youth camps listed on p. 27

G. C. Bylaws Revision

The committee assigned to review and prepare a proposal for revision of the General Conference bylaws to be presented to the 2015 convention has completed its work. The final draft of the revision has been made available to membership through the following link: cog7.org/bylaws. Also, a video presentation reviewing the proposal and comparing it to the current bylaws has been prepared. Members are encouraged to watch this video and become familiar with the proposed revision. We are grateful to those who took the time to provide feedback to our first draft.

During Church business in Milwaukee, members will have opportunity to review the proposals, make amendments, and cast final votes on adoption of the proposed revision as amended. The committee will propose a two-year grace period for local churches and districts to comply with any provisions of the proposal that introduce changes in operation.

— Sam Holland, Chairman
Bylaws Revision Committee



Over 700 attended the General Conference Worship Tour event in suburban Los Angeles, CA, on Sabbath, March 21. Elders Whaid Rose, Israel Steinmetz, and Heber Vega led these day-long events in ten locations.



Over 200 women from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Uruguay, and US gathered in Buenos Aires in February to celebrate CoG7's first Women's Conference in IMC's Zone 3 (South America).





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International Congress

Meeting in Guatemala

Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Nicaragua were represented in the meeting of thirty ministers from the national churches at the CoG7 Convention Center in Guatemala City, March 19-20. IMC Zone 2 representative Sergio Carlos Cerón led the meeting, and IMC President Ramon Ruiz Garza taught from Matthew 5:1-12.

Reports from each of the national delegations were received. They included the growth and development of the churches and the challenges faced in preaching the gospel.

Ramon Ruíz Garza presented information on recent IMC activities in various parts of the world and a report on Cristo Viene ministry. The Costa Rica, El Salvador, Belize, and Nicaragua delegations made commitments to implement this ministry in their countries, joining Mexico and Guatemala, which already support Cristo Viene.

Sabbath, March 21, a meeting with the prominent churches of the country was celebrated at the Cementos Progreso Stadium in Guatemala City, with the theme “One Lord, One Faith.” More than ten thousand



attendees participated in this historical event. Elders Ramon Ruíz and Carlos Cerón preached the Word of God: “The Unity of the Church: Origin and Purpose” and “The Church: One Nation With a Mission.” This great worship event, focusing on the communion and unity of God’s people, was covered by a local newspaper and published the following day.

Sunday, March 22, the delegations were invited on a trip of recreation and fellowship among the attendees. I thank God for the extraordinary way in which we were blessed along with His church in this beautiful country of Guatemala. It was agreed that the next leadership meeting of Zone 2 of the IMC will take place in Mexico in 2017.

— Elder S. Carlos Cerón





Our Theology

Everyone's a Theologian, reads R. C. Sproul's new book title. Aimed at those for whom *theology* conjures up images of endless doctrinal debate or the notion that theology is the business of scholars and spiritual elites, Sproul's book is a timely reminder that we all engage in theology every time we take a Bible text and seek to grasp its meaning, every time we think and talk about God.

Makes sense, for by definition, *theology* is the study of the nature and attributes of God, which all of us do to some degree.

But though everyone's a theologian, not everyone's theology is sound. There's good theology and there's bad theology because people think both right and wrong thoughts about God.

The importance of thinking right thoughts about God is no small matter. In his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A. W. Tozer asserts, "A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well. . . . there is scarcely an error in doctrine or a failure in applying Christian ethics that cannot be traced finally to imperfect and ignoble thoughts about God" (p. 2).

This accounts for the structure of the Shema and the Ten Commandments: Obligation (what we must do) is preceded by declaration (who God is). Loving God with the totality of heart, soul, and strength is to be based on a proper understanding of God: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4). And the basis for rejecting idolatry, reverencing God's name, observing the Sabbath, etc. is this: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2).

God cares about what motivates our obedience; He wants to be the reason we obey. Every generation of the Church must therefore check its theology for biblical soundness, fleshed out in doctrines that demonstrate a unified understanding of the whole scope of Scripture, to the end that the God it reflects is "the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Jesus is God's clearest and best revelation of Himself; therefore, sound theology is inexorably linked to sound Christology. This is what keeps orthodoxy from going off the deep end, separating legalism (I obey, therefore, I'm accepted) from the gospel (I'm accepted, therefore, I obey). The gospel is the good news that my relationship with God isn't based on what I do for God, but on what God in Christ has done for me.

That's what the Protestant Reformation was all about: the search for theological clarity and biblical integrity amid the garage sale clutter of Roman Catholicism. I'm grateful for CoG7 pioneers' commitment to "the Bible alone" (*sola Scriptura*), though by not embracing the *other solas*, they forfeited a robust theological heritage.

There's still a need for the Reformation torch to be carried, so let's see ourselves as part of a relay, passing on a well-lit torch to the next generation, mindful that no church rises above its theology. Sound theology should undergird our doctrines, and the end goal of all good theology is doxology.

— *Whaid Guscott Rose*





East Africa Mission: March 2015

Bryan Cleeton (US), Robert Crawford (UK), and John Njogu (Kenya)
visited four nations in three weeks.

*So the churches were strengthened in the faith,
and increased in number daily (Acts 16:5).*

Burundi: Church en route to baptism of 24 people

Rwanda: "He that has an ear, let him hear. . . ."

Kenya: Students at CoG7's Chesoen Academy

Tanzania: CoG7 leaders John Njogu (*left*), Benard Sulieman (*third from left*),
Selestine Lyamyaga (*third from right*), and Sosthenes Bhatta (*right*)



G. C. Missions
and International
Ministerial Congress:
gcmillions.cog7.org